

had it right when he remarked on the secret partisan process currently underway in the Senate. Earlier this week he said:

It's a very awkward process, at best. There are no experts. There's no actuaries. . . . Typically, in a hearing, you'd have people coming in and you'd also have the media opining about if a hearing took place, and X came in and made comments.

Senator CORKER is spot-on. The American people deserve an open and transparent discussion on how we can best improve healthcare in our Nation. Many Americans are struggling just to keep their heads above water, paying their bills, raising their kids, caring for their parents, and coping with health problems.

Families in Minnesota and in all of our States have been or are currently being ripped apart by opioid addiction. They need our help. They don't need a bill or a budget, for that matter, that is hastily put together for ideological reasons. They don't need policies that undercut their care and their livelihood.

Ninety-one people die every day in the United States from an opioid overdose. Only one in five people who currently need treatment for opioid use disorders is actually getting it.

American lives hang in the balance. People are counting on us to do the right thing. So let's do it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am very pleased to join my colleagues, Senator FRANKEN and Senator WARREN, who are also here for this conversation that was kicked off earlier this afternoon by our friend and colleague from West Virginia, Senator MANCHIN.

West Virginia does not have a whole lot in common with Rhode Island. We are a coastal State. Senator MANCHIN comes from a very landlocked mountainous State. Our biggest mountain in Rhode Island is probably the Johnson landfill. But we have something in common, which is the extent to which opioid addiction and opioid overdoses have stricken our State. We have had over 200 deaths per year. In a State our size, everyone is within 2 or 3 degrees of separation of everyone else. Those 200 deaths reverberate through our whole State.

There is a small town in Rhode Island called Burrillville, up in our northwest corner. Burrillville is a very small town in Rhode Island. I went up there for a meeting about the opioid epidemic at Burrillville High School. In the previous quarter, in just 3 months, that one little town had six deaths from opioid overdoses. That is six times that the little police force had to respond, six times the funeral parlors had to handle grieving families, six times that death notices had to be published in the local paper. It felt like a battering to people in that community.

Senator MANCHIN has a pretty good idea to help make sure that we have

the funding to get treatment to people before these tragedies take place. He proposes what he calls the LifeBOAT Act, which is one penny for each milligram of active opioid in a prescription drug—one penny. It is only a penny, but it would have raised about \$2 billion last year. So \$2 billion would save a lot of people and save a lot of lives.

Just to give you some idea of the scale, Purdue Pharma has generated estimated sales of more than \$35 billion since 1995 for opioid medications. It has annual revenues of about \$3 billion, mostly from OxyContin. That is just one company. So the idea of adding a penny really does not seem to me to be asking very much.

The way we operate now in the Senate, I know that asking corporations to do anything seems impossible because they have the financial whip hand over so many Senators because of the unlimited money they are allowed to spend and threaten to spend in our politics. But really, after all the lives that have been lost, after all the lives have been affected, you would expect that just out of common decency this industry would step up and say: For a penny, we are in. So let's hope they come around to that because I think it is a good plan.

TrumpCare, on the other hand, would be a disaster. So many people get their opioid treatment through Medicaid and through the expansion of Medicaid that the Affordable Care Act created. To undo that, to strip \$1.4 trillion, as President Trump has proposed, out of Medicaid is inevitably going to deny people access to care.

I am not the only one saying this. Someone who works in Providence with recovering heroin addicts wrote to me. His name is Travis. He wrote to me about his clients who are receiving medication-assisted treatments. He credits their being able to come in and get the care that they get to the Affordable Care Act. He said that it is the reason he and his colleagues have been able to help recovering addicts enter effective treatment programs. It works.

Travis relates that repealing the Affordable Care Act would have what he calls a profound impact on his clients' ability to get needed addiction and recovery services.

I will turn the floor over to Senator WARREN in a minute, but I want to recognize one other person. I will not use last names. His name is Mark. He wrote to me from Rumford, RI, which is a very nice part of East Providence, RI.

This is a gentleman who became addicted to opiates at the age of 52. He had surgery, and after the surgical procedure, his doctor gave him opiates for the pain. The doctor was somewhat indiscriminate about continuing to prescribe those opioids.

Mark realized that he was addicted. He went to a recovery group in Rhode Island called CODAC, which does very good work for treatment. He went into

recovery, and he succeeded for 8 years without using opioids.

As sometimes happens, family stresses, business stresses, other stresses intervene. In his case, a family stress caused a relapse, but he knew what to do. He went back to CODAC. He became sober again. Now he is back in recovery, clean and sober.

This pattern of recovery and then an occasional relapse and then back to recovery again is very often the way people who have an addiction get through it. To make sure that the treatment is there for them when they relapse can be a lifesaver.

By the way, Mark is a success. He is in the music business. He has toured around the world. The fact that CODAC was there for him on those two occasions has allowed him to achieve that success. Again, this was a 52-year-old individual whom a surgery sent into addiction.

I will close by pointing out that one of the things the CARA bill, which many of us worked so hard on, accomplished was to send the message that addiction is not a moral failing. It is a medical condition. It should be treated as a medical condition. Not only is it not a moral failing, I think many of us who have had family, loved ones, friends, or any experience with folks who are going through recovery—what we have learned is that recovery is actually a noble accomplishment. It is not an easy path, but it is a path that demands deep honesty, deep courage, deep trust, very often love. It is a path that people who are walking it can and should be proud of, and we should be proud of them for their achievements, and we should be there for them in their relapses and make sure the care that will put them back on that path is available.

I yield the floor to my terrific colleague from Massachusetts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I thank Senator WHITEHOUSE for his important words and all the Senators who have come to the floor this afternoon to talk about the Republican plans to dismantle our healthcare system.

As we speak, Republicans in the Senate are busy behind closed doors working overtime to come up with a secret health plan to ram through the Senate. I guess they are afraid of how the public would react if we could see the full scope of their plans, but in the last 24 hours, we have seen new details about what they want to do. The formula is as clear as it is cruel: destroy healthcare for tens of millions of Americans, including people struggling under the weight of our national opioid crisis. Why? In order to give tax cuts to rich people.

These plans are simply unforgivable, and I say "unforgivable" because I cannot find any justification that makes it

OK to take away health insurance from 23 million Americans. I cannot come up with a single sliver of an argument that says it makes sense to rip away more than \$800 billion from kids with complex medical needs, seniors in nursing homes, and one of the largest sources of help for people and families struggling with substance abuse disorder, all to produce tax breaks for a handful of millionaires and billionaires.

The Republican agenda is destroying healthcare in this country, and it has never been clearer. President Trump released his budget proposal this week. If the healthcare bill is a punch to the gut, his budget is a knife in the ribs. The Trump budget is about the future, and for the future, Trump says there is too much medical research. He wants to cut more than \$5 billion from the NIH budget. That is the place where research is ongoing about treatments for Alzheimer's, cancer, diabetes, ALS. That is America's future that President Trump wants to cut by more than \$5 billion.

Then there is the Republican effort to blow up our existing healthcare system. The Republican bill would open the door to discriminating against people with preexisting conditions, and there is more. Insurance companies could drop coverage for mental health and substance abuse disorders. Insurance companies could decide not to cover pregnancy or maternity care. They can drop coverage for prescription drugs. Insurance companies could, once again, impose lifetime limits on diseases like cancer and heart conditions, even for people on employer plans in States like Massachusetts that want nothing to do with the waivers the Republican bill allows.

The CBO says that out-of-pocket costs for these services that are no longer covered would rise "thousands of dollars a year," but cutting out cancer patients and mamas and newborn babies and people with preexisting conditions just wasn't enough for the Republicans. President Trump used his new budget to cut hundreds of millions of dollars from the Federal agency leading the fight against opioids. Tens of thousands of people are dying, and the Trump budget cuts money needed in the fight against opioids. It gets even worse.

Together, the Republican healthcare bill and the President's budget rip well over a trillion dollars out of the Medicaid Program, which provides health insurance to one in five people in this country. Medicaid funds more than half the people in nursing homes. When a new baby is born in this country, Medicaid pays for about half of those births. Seniors in nursing homes and new babies are just targets for the Republican cuts.

Then, like extra chocolate sauce drizzled over this misery sundae, the budget also cuts the Children's Health Insurance Program by 20 percent over the next decade. Children's health insur-

ance is the program that works together with Medicaid to provide health insurance for one out of every three kids in this country. Trump and the Republicans say: Let them go sick.

What does that mean? Don't repair a hole in their hearts or fix their broken arms? Don't treat them when they get ear infections or does it just leave someone else to pay? If that is the answer, then tell us who? Who exactly is going to pay for the healthcare for these children?

I just don't get what the Republicans in Congress are thinking. I know they have people back in their home States who are begging them to keep healthcare coverage. Disease, accidents, old age, substance abuse, these misfortunes don't ask whether you are a Democrat or a Republican before they come knocking at your door. I just don't get how Republicans can turn their backs on people who will be hurt, but I understand whom the Republicans are helping.

The CBO score lays it out in black and white. The budget lets you go line by line to see just whom the Republicans do care about. The Republican healthcare bill burns down healthcare access for millions of people in this country in order to hand out tax breaks to a tiny handful of millionaires and billionaires.

The Republican budget rips away coverage for people with disabilities so that giant corporations can keep more of their giant profits. The Republican budget tosses seniors out of nursing homes and puts the brakes on Alzheimer's research so the richest people in this country can rake in millions in tax cuts. That is not puzzling; that is unforgivable.

Let's be clear about what is at stake here. A couple of weeks ago, I was at Malden Care Center, which is part of the Cambridge Health Alliance. Health providers like these in Massachusetts are on the frontlines, and they are fighting back against the opioid epidemic.

The folks at Cambridge Health Alliance told me that before the ACA, they were lucky if one out of every three people walking through their doors had health insurance. Today, after years of hard work in Massachusetts to pass bipartisan health reform and then to implement the ACA, more than 97 percent of the people in our State have healthcare. More than 9 out of 10 people coming into Cambridge Health Alliance clinics now have coverage. Because of that coverage, CHA could offer a wide range of services, including treatment for opioids. They are making headway: More lives saved, more success stories, more healthy babies.

I am not going to tell the seniors and the mamas and the people on the frontlines of the opioid crisis they have to give up those gains to pay for tax cuts for the wealthiest people in this country. If Senate Republicans want to defend this indefensible budget and unforgivable healthcare bill, then they

can start by coming out from behind closed doors where they are conducting secret negotiations over healthcare. They can look the American people in the eye and admit they care more about the wealthy few in this country than they do about hard-working families and people who need our help. They can be straight up, and the American people—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—can hold them accountable for what they are trying to do to our families and to our country.

I yield the floor to my colleague from Maryland.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASSIDY). The Senator from Maryland.

TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM DAUSTER

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, the Senate is an institution that remembers its giants, its lions—the Senators who have served with distinction, who negotiated critical legislative deals, who fought for their States and their constituents, and who have participated in historic debates on this Senate floor. They have statues and libraries to remember them and portraits in these halls.

The Senate has been home to many extraordinary individuals but less frequently acknowledged is the truth that no Senator operates alone. We rely on the counsel and good service of dedicated staff in both our committees and personal offices. Among those staff, there is perhaps no greater giant of the Senate than Bill Dauster, who retires this week after more than three decades of service.

With a clear-eyed understanding of the Senate, with all its features and its flaws, a dedication to progressive values and collegiality that has endeared him to Senator and staffer alike, Bill has been an asset to this institution and to all who have served with him. I am very pleased he is with us on the floor today.

Senator Harry Reid called Bill his "utility player" for his ability to step into any issue or complicated matter and find a solution.

I am privileged that Bill Dauster joined my staff early this year to help me set up my office and get it off to a good start in the U.S. Senate. I could not have asked for a better and more knowledgeable guy as I began my service here.

There are few major legislative battles that Bill Dauster has not joined in the past 30 years, including the Children's Health Insurance Program, the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, and the Affordable Care Act. He worked for Senator Feingold when he stood against the so-called PATRIOT Act because of its invasion of privacy, and he helped shepherd Democratic priorities, ranging from the minimum wage to important infrastructure investments.

He has written a book on Senate procedure—and I mean literally—and he has been as much a scholar of the Senate as a participant in its daily life.